

ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT RECORD

NUMBER: CO-076-8-104-EA

CASEFILE/PROJECT NUMBER: COC 60316

PROJECT NAME: Mineral Withdrawal for Unaweep Seep/West Creek Area

ECOREGION/PLANNING UNIT: NA

LEGAL DESCRIPTION:

T. 14 S., R. 103 W., 6th P.M.

Sec. 32, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ and SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 33, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ and NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$.

T. 15 S., R. 103 W., 6th P.M.

Sec. 2, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ and Lot 5 (excepting lot 6);

Sec. 3, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, and SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 4, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 5, Lot 1, E $\frac{1}{2}$ Lot 2, E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{2}$ SE, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, and SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 8, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 9, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, W $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, and SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 10, N $\frac{1}{2}$ N $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, S $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, N $\frac{1}{2}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$, and SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 15, NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 16, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, SE $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, W $\frac{1}{2}$ E $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, and E $\frac{1}{2}$ W $\frac{1}{2}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$;

Sec. 21, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, E $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ NE $\frac{1}{4}$, NE $\frac{1}{4}$ SE $\frac{1}{4}$, and E $\frac{1}{2}$ Lot 1 (excepting therefrom that portion within MS 3257);

Sec. 22, W $\frac{1}{2}$ NW $\frac{1}{4}$ SW $\frac{1}{4}$ and W $\frac{1}{2}$ Lot 1 (excepting therefrom that portion within MS 3257).

containing 1,440 acres more or less.

APPLICANT: This is a mineral withdrawal application initiated by the BLM.

DESCRIPTION OF PROPOSED ACTION AND ALTERNATIVES: The proposed action is to withdraw 1,440 acres of BLM land in the West Creek/Unaweep Seep area in order to protect fragile and sensitive resources in the riparian zone and seep area. The area proposed for withdrawal includes the Unaweep Seep

Research Natural Area (RNA), portions of West Creek below the seep, and the North Fork tributary. Part of the RNA and the entire North Fork corridor are within the boundary of the Palisade Wilderness Study Area. The lands would be withdrawn from mineral entry for a period of 50 years.

COMPARISON OF ALTERNATIVES

ACTIONS	protect fragile and sensitive resources
PROPOSED withdraw the lands from mineral entry	the lands would be closed to mining claim location and locatable mineral development
ALTERNATIVE A do not withdraw the lands	the lands would continue to be open to mining claim location

PLAN CONFORMANCE REVIEW: The proposed action is subject to the following plan:

Name of Plan: Grand Junction Resource Area Resource Management Plan

Date Approved: January 1987

Page or Decision Number:

The proposed action has been reviewed for conformance with this plan (43 CFR 1610.5, BLM 1617.3). The proposed action is being incorporated into the RMP as an amendment.

NEED FOR PROPOSED ACTION: The Grand Junction Resource Management Plan (RMP) is being amended to allow certain changes that would enhance and build upon existing management in the Unawee Seep/West Creek Area. The Notice of Intent to amend the RMP was previously published in the Federal Register. The proposed RMP amendment change addressed in this EA is to withdraw 1440 acres of land in the Unawee Seep/West Creek area from mineral entry.

The purpose of the EA is to analyze the effects of withdrawing the lands from mineral entry. The withdrawal is needed in order to protect significant fragile and sensitive resources in the riparian zone and seep area, including habitat of the endangered southwest willow flycatcher, rare butterfly habitat, sensitive plant species, streams, fisheries, unique hillside springs, and other resources. Although the overall potential for locatable mineral occurrence is considered to be low, there is always some speculative development potential. The 3809 surface management

regulations do not provide adequate regulatory protection for the fragile and sensitive resources in this area because the regulations do not totally preclude exploration and mining activities and require no notification under casual use activities. Prospecting or mining within this area would disturb the pristine environment and could impact the resources. Surface-disturbing activities above the casual use level would be detrimental to protection of these resources.

That portion of the application lands located within the Palisade Wilderness Study Area (part of the RNA and North Fork drainage) are currently open to mining claim location but are regulated under the 3802 regulations. Although operations are currently subject to the nonimpairment criteria, the WSA has been recommended as not suitable for wilderness. Nondesignation would open the area to prospecting and mining activities, which could impact the fragile and sensitive resources.

If surface disturbance was proposed within this area, the BLM could be forced to conduct a validity examination or obtain a court injunction to stop the activity. These measures are time-consuming and expensive, and don't prevent future mineral entry. In short, the most practical solution to avoid these situations is to withdraw the area.

AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT / ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS / MITIGATION MEASURES:

CRITICAL ELEMENTS

AIR QUALITY: N/A

Signature of specialist: /s/ Sparky Taber

CULTURAL RESOURCES: There is no proposed surface disturbing activity to be generated by the proposed mineral withdrawal. A Class I literature files search indicated that no previously recorded historic properties (properties eligible for inclusion to the National Register of Historic Places) are present within the area of the proposed undertaking. Since the project has no potential to adversely affect historic properties, a Class III (thorough and intensive) pedestrian inventory of the area for cultural resource properties is considered unnecessary. No further cultural resources work is considered necessary for the proposed undertaking.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Patricia Walker-Buchanan 09/10/98

FLOODPLAINS, WETLANDS, RIPARIAN ZONES, AND ALLUVIAL VALLEYS:
The proposed action will preclude adverse impacts to these resources by preventing mineral extraction in the area.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David Smith 15 Sept. 98

NATIVE AMERICAN RELIGIOUS CONCERNS: Since no cultural resources inventory was conducted for the proposed project, it is not known whether any traditional cultural properties are present, however, no other evidence suggests that the area would have held special concern for Native American tribes. Thus, no Native American Indian consultation was initiated, nor is such consultation considered necessary for the proposed undertaking.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Patricia Walker-Buchanan 09/10/98

PRIME AND UNIQUE FARMLANDS: NA

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens 9-30-98

THREATENED AND ENDANGERED SPECIES: Bald eagles and peregrine falcons make such occasional use of the area that neither the proposed action nor its alternative would likely affect them. The proposed action could end the chance for the creation of mine bat habitat. Some of these bats are (proposed) sensitive species. However, since there is little mineral incentive for such a mine to be excavated, the reduction in opportunity is negligible. Of other sensitive species, there are several that would be benefited by the removal of a significant risk factor to their habitats. Some of these species are the silver-haired bat, Cooper's hawk, northern leopard frog, Great Basin silverspot butterfly, canyonland's satyr (butterfly), hackberry emperor butterfly, giant helleborine orchid, canyon bog orchid, and Fendler barberry bush. Concern for the rare plant and animal community at the Unaweep Seep, as early as the mid-1970s, placed in the Whitewater Management Framework Plan the recommendation of a withdrawal from minerals entry. With the proposed action, BLM would convincingly be able to claim protection for these sensitive species and communities. The No Action Alternative would cause BLM to fail to provide assurance of adequate protection in a high profile area for these sensitive resources.

Signature of specialist: Ron Lambeth 9-16-98

WASTES, HAZARDOUS OR SOLID: Hazardous wastes or solid wastes would not be expected to be an issue except that a mineral withdrawal and resulting elimination of potential mining activity would eliminate one source of hazardous wastes.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Alan Kraus 1 October 1998

WATER QUALITY, SURFACE OR GROUND: The withdrawal area lies within the West Creek watershed, including the Unaweep seep area and North Fork tributary. The prevention of surface disturbance from mining activities would eliminate future water quality degradation and maintain existing water quality in both the surface and ground water resources.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Scheidt 9-10-98

WILDERNESS, AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN, WILD AND SCENIC RIVERS: All of the withdrawal north of Highway 141 less the newly acquired parcel is within the WSA. This withdrawal would help protect the riparian, wetlands and other natural values of the WSA over the long term.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Wade Johnson 9-17-98

NON-CRITICAL ELEMENTS

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION: The withdrawal would have very little impact on access or transportation because of the severe terrain. Access is now very limited and in most areas no more than foot access would be possible without major construction. State Highway 141 traverses the withdrawal along West Creek and access would remain via the highway. No vehicle access would be developed from mining if the area is withdrawn, but the possibility of access from mining was small due to the lack of minerals to develop.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David K. Trappett 10-5-98

FOREST MANAGEMENT: NA

Signature of specialist: /s/ David P. Stevens 9-30-98

GEOLOGY AND MINERALS: The application lands have a low resource and development potential for locatable minerals (speculative development only). The withdrawal would prevent the location of mining claims, and preclude surface disturbance from prospecting and mining activities under the Mining Law of 1872. There will be little or no impact on locatable mineral resources because the potential for occurrence and development is considered to be low.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Bruce Fowler 9-9-98

HYDROLOGY AND WATER RIGHTS: The withdrawal area lies within the West Creek watershed, including the Unaweep seep area and North Fork tributary. The prevention of surface disturbance from mining activities would eliminate future impacts to the hydrology of the area, maintaining existing runoff characteristics.

There are no water rights included with this action, nor would any water rights be impacted by this proposal.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Scheidt 9-10-98

LAND STATUS/REALTY AUTHORIZATIONS: The surface and mineral estates

of the subject lands are owned by the federal government and administered by the BLM. Through two separate purchases, a total of 320 acres of private land was recently acquired by BLM, including all minerals. A review of the Master Title Plats indicates the following realty authorizations:

COC-58936 - Acquisition (240 acres)	COC-12346 - Telephone line R/W
COC-59753 - Acquisition (80 acres)	COC-40194 - Power line R/W
COC-059422 - Highway R/W	COC-60316 - BLM withdrawal apln.

The proposed action would not adversely affect any realty authorizations of record.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Robin Buchanan 9-15-98

PALEONTOLOGY: NA

Signature of specialist: /s/ Bruce Fowler 9-9-98

RANGE MANAGEMENT: The proposed action will have no impact to livestock or rangeland management in the area.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Jim Dollerschell

RECREATION: The proposed action would have no direct impact on the recreational opportunities present in the area. The withdrawal would be of long term benefit to recreational opportunities in the area as it would eliminate the potential for visually obtrusive activities due to mineral extraction.

Signature of specialist: /s/ Joe L. Ashor 9-22-98

SOILS: The withdrawal would be of long-term benefit to the soils resource by limiting or precluding any surface disturbance from mineral extraction.

Signature of Specialist: /s/ TBargsten 9-10-98

VISUAL RESOURCES: The perennial stream banks that make up the withdrawal area are highly visible from Colorado Highway 141 (Tabaquache Scenic Byway) or are seen by hikers using the trail up North Fork of West Creek. The sensitive nature of these areas are an additional justification for the proposed action and no adverse impacts from the proposed action are believed possible. The No action alternative, however, could allow considerable impacts.

Signature of specialist: /s/Wade Johnson 9-17-98

WILDLIFE, AQUATIC: The proposed action would be a long-term benefit to the aquatic resources by limiting or precluding any surface disturbance from mineral

extraction which would cause water quality degradation.

Signature of specialist: /s/ David Smith 15 Sept. 98

WILDLIFE, TERRESTRIAL: Riparian species of wildlife could only be benefited by the removal of a risk factor to riparian habitat. The most productive riparian wildlife habitat, as recorded in the pre-RMP wildlife inventory, is in the proposed withdrawal area. The Natural Heritage Inventory of Mesa County, Colorado (1996) found quality plant communities in high seral condition along West Creek and North Fork of West Creek within the proposed withdrawal area. These representative sites would be protected from the degrading that would occur if a mining claim were to be worked at these locations. The associated wildlife would be adversely affected if their host plants were to be lost due to active removal or competition from the invading weeds that attends ground disturbance. Big game would also be protected by the proposed action. At this part of Unaweep Canyon big game travel routes become constricted and a mining operation would disproportionately affect movement and range use. The No Action Alternative would leave open the chance that serious impacts would occur to this area. The embarrassment of such an event would be especially intense due to the BLM's agreement with the Colorado Natural Areas Program and due to local, county, and other state entities that monitor the area.

Signature of specialist: Ron Lambeth 9-16-98

STANDARDS FOR PUBLIC LAND HEALTH: The proposed action has been reviewed for each of the standards for Public Land Health in Colorado. Since the proposed withdrawal is an administrative action only and proposes no new surface disturbance, there would be no direct impact on public land health. There would be a long-term beneficial impact by closing the area to mineral development.

1. *Upland Soils exhibit infiltration and permeability rates that are appropriate to soil type, climate, land form and geologic processes.* The withdrawal would be of long-term benefit to upland soils by precluding any surface disturbance from mineral prospecting and mining.
2. *Riparian systems are functioning properly or able to recover.* The withdrawal would be of long-term benefit to the riparian system by precluding any surface disturbance from mineral prospecting and mining.
3. *Maintenance of healthy, productive plant and animal communities of native and other desirable species.* The withdrawal would be of long-term benefit to native plants and animals by precluding any surface disturbance from mineral prospecting and mining.
4. *Maintenance or enhancement of special status, threatened and endangered, and other plants and animals designated by the BLM.* The withdrawal

would be of long-term benefit to sensitive plants and animals by precluding any surface disturbance from mineral prospecting and mining.

5. *Achieve or exceed the Water Quality Standards established by the State of Colorado and the Clean Water Act.* The withdrawal would be of long-term benefit to water quality by precluding any surface disturbance from mineral prospecting and mining.

PERSONS/AGENCIES CONSULTED: The notices for the proposed withdrawal and resource management plan amendment/EA were published in the federal register and the local newspaper. The notice of availability of the EA was published in the newspaper for a 30-day public review, and the EA was also sent to the governor's office for the 60-day consistency review. No comments were received on the proposal.

RATIONALE FOR THE RECOMMENDATION:

The Grand Junction Resource Area RMP is being amended to allow certain changes that would enhance and build upon existing management in the Unaweep Seep/West Creek Area. The proposed RMP amendment change addressed in this EA is to withdraw 1440 acres of land from mineral entry, including the Unaweep Seep Research Natural Area, and lands along West Creek and North Fork. The Notice of Intent to amend the RMP was previously published in the Federal Register and local newspaper. The withdrawal was also addressed in the EA prepared on the Unaweep Seep Natural Area Management Plan. No comments have been received against the proposal. The idea of protecting significant resource values is generally supported by the community.

The withdrawal is needed in order to protect significant fragile and sensitive resources in the riparian zone and seep area, including habitat of the endangered southwest willow flycatcher, rare butterfly habitat, sensitive plant species, streams, fisheries, unique hillside springs, and other resources. Although the overall potential for locatable mineral occurrence is considered to be low, there is always some speculative development potential. The 3809 surface management regulations do not provide adequate regulatory protection for the fragile and sensitive resources in this area because the regulations do not totally preclude exploration and mining activities and require no notification under casual use activities. Prospecting or mining within this area would disturb the pristine environment and could impact the resources. Surface-disturbing activities above the casual use level would be detrimental to protection of these resources.

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FONSI

The environmental assessment, analyzing the environmental effects of the proposed action, has been reviewed. This review resulted in a finding of no significant impact on the human environment. Therefore, an environmental impact statement is not necessary to further analyze the environmental effects of the proposed action. It is my recommendation that the RMP be amended and that the proposed action be implemented.

MITIGATION MEASURES: None

REMARKS: None

COMPLIANCE PLAN: None

ATTACHMENTS: Map of withdrawal application area.

SIGNATURE OF PREPARER: /s/ Bruce Fowler 10-16-98

SIGNATURE OF ENVIRONMENTAL COORDINATOR:/s/ David P. Stevens

DATE SIGNED: 10-16-98

SIGNATURE OF FIELD OFFICE MANAGER:

DATE SIGNED:

1/12/99

RMP AMENDMENT DECISION: I concur with the above determination. It is my decision to amend the RMP and implement the proposal described in the environmental assessment upon secretarial approval of the withdrawal.

SIGNATURE OF STATE DIRECTOR:

DATE SIGNED:

1/25/99

GEOLOGIC MAP OF THE UNAWEEP SEEP/WEST CREEK PARCEL

(FROM USGS
OFR 83-795)

